Table of Contents

1. Chapter 1
2. Chapter 2
3. Chapter 3
4. Chapter 4
5. Chapter 5

Chapter 1

Cinderheart opened her eyes.

She was freezing cold. So cold that when she looked down at her sleek, gray tabby fur, she expected icicles to be hanging from it.

There weren't any icicles, (at least not on her) but there were some hanging from the roof of the warriors den. The sticks, twigs, and grass woven together were strong, but not enough to prevent the cold air from coming in.

Cinderheart slowly rose to her paws. Most of the cats were still sleeping, but there were some empty nests. *Dawn patrol*, she thought.

The sky was a soft shade of pink with gray clouds stretched across it. It was snowing lightly, and a thin layer of frost covered the whole ThunderClan camp: all of the dens, the dead, brittle bushes, even the hard, dirt ground. It was the middle of leaf-bare, and prey was scarce.

I'll go ask Bramblestar if I can lead a hunting patrol, Cinderheart decided.

She carefully made her way around her den mates and up the steep rocks into Bramblestar's den. The ThunderClan leader was curled up in his nest with his mate, Squirrelflight, by his side.

Before Cinderheart was even into the den all the way, the leader and deputy raised their heads and looked in her direction, amber and green eyes glowing in the dim sunlight.

"Good morning, Cinderheart," Bramblestar meowed.

"Good morning Bramblestar and Squirrelflight." Cinderheart dipped her head in greeting. "I was wondering if I could lead a hunting patrol."

"Sure," Squirrelflight answered. "Lionblaze left with the dawn patrol a few minutes ago. He took Snowbush, Birchfall, and Sorrelstripe with him. You can choose three cats to go with you, and you can hunt near the abandoned Twoleg nest; there might be some mice sheltering there."

"Yes, Squirrelflight." Cinderheart headed back to the warriors den, and roused Blossomfall, Ivypool, and Hollytuft from their slumber. "Hunting patrol," she whispered into each of their ears. The cats stretched, then followed Cinderheart out into the forest.

Together, Cinderheart's hunting patrol had caught two mice and one blackbird, barely enough to feed the Clan.

"Should we keep hunting?" Ivypool asked. "It's not even sunhigh yet; we can probably find some more prey."

"Okay," Cinderheart meowed. "Let's try near the ShadowClan border."

By sunhigh, Cinderheart had caught a squirrel. It was quite scrawny; hardly big enough to feed one cat, let alone a whole Clan.

"Hopefully more patrols will catch more prey," Blossomfall mewed.

Hollytuft meowed in agreement. "Shall we go back to camp?"

"Yes, we've hunted all morning." Cinderheart started to lead the way back to camp. She barely took a few steps when she stopped. "Did you hear that?" She whispered, her voice barely audible.

The cats slowly turned around. A cat was crouched behind a tree, staring at them. He reeked of ShadowClan. Cinderheart recognized him as Puddleshine, the new medicine cat of ShadowClan. Leafpool

had went to live there for a couple of moons to train him when Littlecloud died.

Like Cinderheart and her patrol, Puddeshine's fur was damp from the snow. He shivered as he spoke, "Hi...Um, I'm Puddleshine, medicine cat of ShadowClan, and I have a message for Bramblestar from Rowanstar. Can you please take me to your camp?"

"Sure, Puddleshine," Cinderheart meowed. "Follow me. Ivypool, can you take Blossomfall and Hollytuft and hunt some more? Stay near the border."

"Don't worry; it's just me," Puddleshine meowed as he padded after Cinderheart to camp. "Rowanstar wants to meet with all the leaders to discuss the shortage of prey. He told me to go to all the camps and ask if the leader, medicine cat, and one warrior could meet at the island tomorrow night. So far I've been to RiverClan."

Cinderheart felt sorry for the young cat. He was the age of an apprentice and he was already the medicine cat of ShadowClan, and he had wanted to be a warrior, not a medicine cat. Rowanstar had forced him to go to all the Clans by himself, not caring about his safety at all.

"Wow," she murmured softly. "That's a lot in one day, going to all the Clans. Especially since it's the middle of leaf-bare. We'd offer you freshkill, but we hardly have any at all."

"It's alright," Puddleshine mewed. "We barely have any prey in Shadowclan. We're chewing on pine nettles, literally. Oops, I guess I shouldn't have told you that. Rowanstar hates it whenever someone says anything to make our Clan look weak."

"Don't worry, Puddleshine," Cinderheart meowed. "All the Clans are hungry right now. And trust me, ShadowClan isn't weak. None of the Clans are."

They had reached the camp entrance.

Puddleshine followed Cinderheart through the gorse tunnel.

The clearing was almost deserted. Normally, a lot of cats would be

hanging outside at this time of day, but because it was so freezing, everyone was huddled in their dens.

Leafpool padded out of the medcicne den. Her eyes widened when she saw Puddleshine.

"Puddleshine, hello!" She meowed. "How are you? How's ShadowClan?"

"Well, we barely have any prey, and-" Puddleshine was cut off by Bramblestar, who was briskly trotting down the High Ledge.

"Puddleshine!" He mewed. "Do you have a message from Rowanstar, or did you come here to speak to our medicine cats?"

"Um, both actually. Well, kind of. Rowanstar-"

"Come to my den to discuss this, please. Squirrelflight, you come with me. And Leafpool and Jayfeather."

"What about me?" Alderheart stood at the entrance of the medicine den.

"See to your duties, Alderheart." Bramblestar stared sternly at his son before briskly trotting back up the High Ledge.

A few moments later, Bramblestar, Squirrelflight, Leafpool, Jayfeather, and Puddleshine came out of the den.

Bramblestar briskly trotted over to Cinderheart. "Please see Puddleshine to the WindClan border." Then he turned around and briskly trotted back up the High Ledge. "Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather under the High Ledge for a Clan meeting!"

He started to explain about how he was going to the island tomorrow to discuss the shortage of prey with the other leaders.

Cinderheart then led Puddleshine to the WindClan border.

End of chapter one. (Why do I keep saying Bramblestar briskly trotted? o-o)

Chapter 2

[image]

That evening, Bramblestar, Leafpool, and Cinderheart headed to the island to meet with the other leaders.

The lake was frozen, glowing white with the reflection of the bright moon.

No one spoke. Cinderheart decided to brake the ice (not literately) by saying, "So, what do you think Rowanstar has to say to everyone?"

"I don't know," Leafpool meowed. "I doubt he thinks we should team up and work together, but what other choice do we have?"

"I just hope that Rowanstar hasn't set up an attack for us," Bramblestar fretted. "I had Squirrelflight take some warriors to guard the ShadowClan border, just in case."

"What about WindClan?" Cinderheart wondered.

"Let's just hope that they don't attack us."

Soon, they arrived on the island. Rowanstar, Puddleshine, Mistcloud, Onestar, Kesterlflight, Hootwhisker, Mistyfoot, Willowshine, and Sneezecloud were there.

Rowanstar stepped forward. "Thank you for coming, everyone. All the Clans are short on prey right now. I want this meeting to be short and quick. I want to-"

"We want a lot of things, Rowanstar," Onestar hissed, unsheathing his claws. "But you're not getting any of our prey."

"I'm not asking for any of your scrawny, pitiful, rabbits!" Rowanstar growled.

"Stop fighting, please!" Mistystar mewed firmly. "Rowanstar, please just say what you want. I have a Clan to take care of. And Onestar, please stop jumping to conclusions!"

"Oh, shut up, you fish-faced-"

"Stop!" Cinderheart meowed. "Let's all admit that we're starving. ThunderClan barely has any prey. You might deny it, but it's the same for your Clans. The lake is frozen, and so are the rivers. Mistystar, your Clans' diet mainly consists of fish, and you can't get any because the river and lake is frozen. Rowanstar, please just say your plans."

"Well said, Cinderheart," Rowanstar meowed. "It's clear that we are starving, as you just said. I want to make it so our Clans can hunt outside of our borders. I don't mean that ShadowClan should be able to hunt in ThunderClan territory; what I mean is that we should be able to hunt outside clan borders."
"I've considered that Rowanstar," Mistystar meowed. "But it wouldn't be fair to any rouges, loners, or kittypets that hunt outside my borders. And there are quite a few. If you're sure that no one lives there and will attack you, then go right ahead."
"Okay," Rowanstar mewed. "I just wanted to check with all the leaders to make sure that that is okay."
The leaders muttered agreement and then left.

"Well that was a waste of my time," Bramblestar meowed as they approached the ThunderClan/WindClan border.
"It's not like Rowanstar to have a meeting with all the leaders to check that a new hunting rule is okay," Leafpool stated.
Cinderheart nodded in agreement.

Soon, they approached the camp. A reek immediately hit Cinderheart's nose. "Oh my StarClan," she muttered. "Fox!!"

Chapter 3

Cinderheart, Leafpool, and Bramblestar rushed into camp.

Cats were everywhere, licking their wounds. Leafpool raced into the medicine den to get herbs.

No foxes were visible; it was clear that they had left. But how many were there?

The worst sight was a cat lying in the center of the camp. Bramblestar pressed his nose into her fur. Alderheart was pressing cobwebs and marigold into her bleeding wounds and force-feeding her herbs.

The cat was Squirrelflight.

Cinderheart raced over to the only cats who didn't look injured, just shaken: Daisy and Millie.

"How many foxes?" She asked breathlessly.

"S-seven or eight," Daisy replied, shaking. "A-all huge and strong."

"Their claws looked so sharp," Millie gasped. "Their teeth so pointy."

They started to shudder rapidly.

"Get a grip on yourselves!" Cinderheart hissed, annoyed that these cats were so lazy that they couldn't lift a weak claw to help fight the foxes and protect their clan. "Is anyone else injured badly besides Squirrelfight?"

"I don't think so," Millie replied weakly. "Just small scratches and bites."

"Well, what are you waiting for?" Cinderheart meowed. "If you don't even know what marigold looks like, grab some cobwebs and wet some moss. Now!"

Millie and Daisy scattered away like startled pigeons.

Cinderheart raced over to Bramblestar and Squirrelflight. "F-Foxes harmed her," Bramblestar whimpered like a sick kit. Squirrelflights eyes glazed over. "I...love you.." She then took her last breath and her head fell to the ground.

"I'm so sorry, Bramblestar," Cinderheart whispered. "Squirrelflight was a wonderful deputy and will never be forgotten. She's safe in StarClan now, with her parents, Firestar and Sandstorm."

"Thank you Cinderheart." Bramblestar meowed. He stood up and called the cats together.

"This has been a tragic experience for ThunderClan." Bramblestar meowed. "Are any cats badly injured?"

"Lots of scratches and bruises," Alderheart whispered. "Lots of cats will need to stay in the medicine den for a while."

"Very well ." Bramblestar made a strange choking sound in his throat. "This is certainly a challenging moment. Squirrelflight, my mate, deputy, and best friend has joined StarClan. It is not her time. I must appoint a new deputy."

Chapter 4

Bramblestar padded up to the Highledge and called, "All cats old enough to catch their own prey, gather under the Highledge for a Clan meeting."

Most of the Clan was already in the center of camp.

"It is time to appoint a new deputy," Bramblestar meowed. "StarClan, please hear and approve of my choice. The new deputy of ThunderClan shall be..." Bramblestar paused, as if he was just now deciding who the next deputy would be.

"..Cinderheart."

Cinderheart stared at Bramblestar, shocked. Her?!? Was she good enough? Would the Clan approve?

"Cinderheart," Lionblaze purred, and rubbed his muzzle against hers. "Congratulations."

"Thanks," Cinderheart mewed.

The rest of the Clan joined in on the cheer.

"Cinderheart! Cinderheart! Cinderheart!"

Pride welled up inside Cinderheart, but fear threatened to replace it.
Would she be a good deputy??

Chapter 5

Squirrelflight's body lay in the center of camp. Because of the lack of herbs, no lavender and rosemary were draped over her ginger fur. Instead, dried up leaves from leaf-fall and brittle pine needles were covering her. Despite the strong scent of the pine needles, the reek of death still clung to Squirellflight's fur.

Bramblestar, Leafpool, Alderheart, and Sparkpelt were all huddled around the former deputy. In the distance, pale pink and gray mingled together to form the approaching dawn. Squirrelflight's vigil was almost over.

Graystripe and Millie, the elders, carried Squirrelflight out of camp to dig a hole to deposit her body into. When they returned, Graystripe said, "I remember when Squirtelflight was just a little apprentice. She would always sneak into the Warriors' den."

"She refused to stay behind in ThunderClan when she joined me in going with cats from the other Clans to the sun-drown-place to talk to Midnight. I feel in love with her on that journey."

"She agreed to mother Jayfeather, Lionblaze, and Hollyleaf for me," Leafpool meowed quietly. "She was the first person I told my secret to."

"She came up with the concept of Daylight Gatherings," Thornclaw rumbled. "The idea didn't last, but at the time, it held the conflicting Clams together."

"She was an excellent mother," Alderheart meowed. "To me and Sparkpelt, and also to Dandelionkit and Juniperkit."

Other cats joined in to share their memories of Squirrelflight. As deputy, Cinderheart felt like she should say something about Squirrelflight.

"She was an excellent deputy," Cinderheart mewed. "She always

made sure that everyone had enough to eat and drink, from the eldest elder to the tiniest kit. I know that I will never be about to be a greater deputy than her, but if I could accomplish half of what Squirrelflight had done, that would be enough."

Everyone looked impressed by what Cinderheart said. Feeling a little embarrassed, she meowed, "Cloudtail, could you please lead the dawn patrol?"

"Sure," the white tom meowed. "I'll take Snowbush, Whitewing, and Brightheart with me. We'll all blend in well with the snow."

Along with some other cats, Cinderheart chucked at Cloudtail's joke.

"Okay, why don't I send out two hunting patrols. Maybe we should listen to Rowanstar's idea and hunt outside of our borders?"

"Okay, but maybe one patrol should go into the outside territory and that other should stay in ThunderClan territory?" Bramblestar suggested.

"Great idea, Bramblestar," Cinderheart meowed. "Ivypool, you can lead the patrol that goes into the outside territory. Brackenfur, you can lead that patrol that stays in ThunderClan territory. Choose whichever cats that you like."

"What about the foxes?" Daisy fretted. "There was a whole pack of them!"

"Yes, please watch out for foxes," Cinderheart meowed. "I'm fact, I'd better go with the patrol that goes into outside territory."

Cinderheart followed Ivypool's patrol out of the camp.